

Education and bats

For those involved in interpretation, school visits, any work involving a tree of structure that has bats. House Custodians, Countryside staff, Property Managers, Project Managers, Building staff, Learning and Discovery staff.

Key points

- Bats are found on all National Trust properties – buildings, parklands, farmland, woodland, coastline and gardens so provide a good opportunity to link wildlife to all areas of our operations.
- The general public's fascination with bats should be utilised.
- Awareness of roosts being protected (even when bats absent) should be promoted.
- Opportunities exist to educate the public and staff about bats through displays, talks and walks, leaflets and presentations.

1. BACKGROUND

National Trust properties are important for bats. In the past this fact has been looked on as a problem, sometimes a nuisance and rarely something to celebrate. Changing attitudes to bats have altered perceptions and these mammals are now more generally welcomed and have become a focus of interest to the general public. Accurate information about bats is still sometimes hard to find whereas myths, false information and poor attitudes still abound.

2. POSITION

The National Trust is committed to looking after the wildlife associated with its properties and the move towards conservation continues. The Trust realises that education is an important tool in the conservation of the wildlife on its land.

National Trust Act 1907.

The National Trust was established in 1895 for the “permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands and tenements (including buildings) of beauty or scientific interest and as regards lands for the preservation...of their natural aspect features and animal and plant life”.

3. ACTION

Trust employees

Properties. Those directly involved with property management should have a basic knowledge about bats and their requirements. They are likely to encounter them when carrying out maintenance work, farm management, woodland management, building renovations, developments, organising evening concerts or tree surgery. Those with properties containing the rarer species should have more detailed knowledge and some training. Knowledge can be gained from written material and from others with well-developed skills so bat information sources need to be available to Property Managers – web sites, leaflets, bat group details and telephone help lines.

Regions. The Regional managers and advisors should also be aware of bat issues generally and specifically at sites where the rarer species are found. Their knowledge should be gained in part from training courses and also from supplied printed material.

Visitors/volunteers

The presence of bats using a property creates extra interest for the public and this should be optimised. It gives a new dimension to the property. Volunteers and employees associated may wish to develop the bat theme and incorporate it into their work

- Display boards could incorporate a panel explaining about the bats, where they live and their life styles.
- Guided bat walks on summer evenings are always very popular with the public and members. They do require expert use of bat detectors, and local bat groups may be able to contribute their expertise.
- Bat talks and associated social events again are popular. Materials for talks, such as colour slides/Powerpoint are available from the Conservation Directorate. Local bat groups may be able to supply their expertise.
- Bat surveys can give members, volunteers or the public a chance to see bats. In a few Trust properties checking bat boxes is an easy way for all ages to experience bats close up. Roost counts, too, create interest. These require an experienced bat worker to lead, and care needs to be taken to ensure bats are not disturbed without a licence.
- Bat box building by local groups such as Scouts, volunteers or as a work day can be the foundation for a sound local conservation project. Follow-up work on checking maintains the interest.
- Some properties lend themselves ideally to special batty events – bat parties, children's workshops, face painting, collages, murals.
- Conversion or improvement of structures to form bat roosts or hibernacula can encourage numbers of keen volunteers to erect roosting places inside tunnels, chisel out mortar joints, erect protective grilles across entrances etc. Such projects should be carefully designed using bat and buildings experts for advice, particularly regarding the law.
- Information leaflets on bats are available from the Bat Conservation Trust and may provide extra interest for visitors.
- Articles in National Trust publications increase public awareness and understanding.

Sites

Some properties already take special precautions when bats are present. For example:

- churches cover over sensitive surfaces to protect them from droppings
- grilles have been erected to prevent human access into hibernation sites
- footpaths near a tree roost have been re-routed
- summer evening concerts or fireworks are scheduled to finish before the bats emerge

Explanations for these temporary changes can be part of the education process and should be prominent near protected areas.

Some properties already celebrate the bats they have. For example:

- Arlington has a CCTV directed on the bats in the roof and operated by the public downstairs.

Further information

Bat Group Contacts list. Bat Conservation Trust 020 7627 2629

List of leaflets about bats. BCT, 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG

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